

The Arms Trade, Human Rights, and US Foreign Policy

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FYS - Economic Globalization

May, 2003

The United States, being a capitalist country, will pursue foreign trade relationships in any sector based on their potential benefit to our economy and political status. We are not global mediators or peacemakers; we are run by businessmen, first and foremost. The United States is also the global juggernaut in the arms industry; between 1996 and 2000, the US was responsible for just under half of *all* weapons transfers¹. Currently, the US Vice President, Treasury Secretary, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State, Commerce Secretary, National Security Adviser, Secretary of Veteran's Affairs, and White House Chief of Staff all have significant and current ties to various multinational corporations.² Lynne Cheney, wife of US Vice President and oil CEO Dick Cheney, is a board member of Lockheed Martin, the largest weapons manufacturer in the world.³ James Roche, current Secretary of the Air Force, was a corporate president of Northrop Grumman, a military aircraft manufacturer, before he was appointed by George W. Bush.⁴ Gordon England, former CEO at General Dynamics (a major supplier of aircrafts to the US government), as well as a brief stint at Lockheed Martin, was appointed as Secretary of the Navy until January of 2003 when he was named the first Deputy Secretary of the newly formed Department of Homeland Security.⁵ There has never before been such an obvious linkage between American government and big business, and the weapons industry is well represented in positions of political power.

One would hope that the obvious profit-based motives of the American government would take a backseat when making decisions regarding the sales of weapons, the principal enablers of war and destruction worldwide. Unfortunately, the arms trade is run like any other global industry, with competition and superiority based solely on prices and potential profits. The issues of human rights, ethics, morality and the consequences of weapons sales always come second. Because of their necessary role in any modern conflict or full-blown war, arms sales are also used as tools for political maneuvering. No sale of arms from a global superpower like the United States is made without full knowledge of the impact that acquisition of arms has on the

¹ SIPRI 2002 Yearbook

² World Socialist Website, 2001. www.wsws.org

³ Burrows, 2002

⁴ US Dept. of the Air Force, http://www.af.mil/news/biographies/roche_jg.html

⁵ US Dept. of Homeland Security, <http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/display?theme=11&content=14>

buying country, as well as the impact on the producing country. A sale of weapons by the US is always motivated by a desire to serve US political interests, as well as a desire to make American corporations richer.

Basics of the Arms Trade

The United States will sell arms to any buyer who has the money and is not currently a threat to US hegemony or security. There are three legal ways that an outside party can acquire weapons from the United States: the Foreign Military Sales program, the Commercial sales program, and through conventional trade supervised by the Department of Commerce. Foreign Military Sales (FMS), which are negotiated by representatives of the US government, are the most common way to buy from US manufacturers. These sales are usually of high-grade weapons systems that the US military uses themselves (although they will not sell the very latest military technology to foreign parties, for obvious reasons). The amount of credit available to Third World countries has also increased steadily from the 1970's, making state-of-the art military equipment available to impoverished countries, often due to the inept governing of a totalitarian regime. FMS also encompass the sale or grant of military training, maintenance, managerial and technical assistance to foreign parties. Jordan, the Philippines, Thailand and Turkey each received more than \$1.5 million worth of military training in 1998 alone.⁶ The United States Army School of the Americas, or USARSA, was a military training school with the sole purpose of training Latin American military personnel in the American ways of war. Located at Fort Benning, Georgia, USARSA was in operation for 54 years and graduated more than 60,000 students before being closed down in December of 2000 following a major human rights scandal. In September 1996, the Pentagon released seven training manuals used at the USARSA. These manuals, which taught murder, torture, and extortion, were used to teach courses at the school during the 1980s despite explicit U.S. army policy. Human rights activists were outraged that the United States was so blatantly disregarding their own supposed policies regarding military tactics; it was further discovered that graduates of USARSA were often members of murderous rebel groups and militia or guerrilla armies of Latin America.⁷

Commercial sales are negotiated directly through US weapons corporations, and mainly deal in small arms and police equipment. Any firm wishing to export an item on the US Munitions List (a list of weaponry products acceptable for sale in the US) must get an export license from the US Department of State, which are granted in all but the very rare exceptional case. Applications for export technically are subject to the same human rights standards as those sold directly by the government through FMS, but commercial sales are not even reported to Congress if they total less than \$1

⁶ Burrows, 2002

⁷ Federation of American Scientists, www.fas.org

million. Conventional trade in arms, although meant to be supervised by the Department of Commerce, often involves "gray market" items that are not listed on the US Munitions List. This area of trade also includes "crime control and detection equipment" like stun guns, straitjackets, leg irons and thumbscrews. There have also been a number of cases of conventional trade from the US to countries currently under a weapons embargo for human rights violations, such as sales to the South African Air Force under apartheid, and Chile under the rule of the brutal General Pinochet.⁸ The buyers of American-made weapons come from all over the world and from all political backgrounds. Customers include everyone from industrialized democracies like France and Spain to undemocratic, repressive parties like Indonesia's General Suharto and Omar Torrijos of Panama.

The black market in arms is thriving, much like illegal drug trade; capitalizing on the demand for products that are not in ready supply legally. For a private party to obtain weapons legally, they are subject to a fair amount of bureaucracy, and many of the most dangerous purchasers would not wish to have any government officials poking through their personal history. The black market is run by arms brokers, businessmen who set up deals worldwide. They arrange the deals covertly and without a paper trail over the phone, often not even coming in contact with weapons at all. Arms are often sourced from old stockpiles of the Soviet Union or eastern European countries, and sold to warring factions in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Profits are kept in anonymous offshore accounts, and the actual transporting of weapons is done by traffickers who travel constantly between countries. Arms brokers usually have close ties to government, and can easily bribe the right official or know just how to manipulate loopholes in weapons trading legislation.⁹

Human Rights and the Arms Trade

As stated before, almost half of all weapons sales originate in the United States, with the closest competitors selling about one-fifth of the arms that the US sells. This means that the United States has a special responsibility in the arms trade as the predominant player, and a role as status-setter for trade regulations worldwide. The US International Arms Sales code of Conduct Act of 1999 states that: "The President shall consider the following criteria...The government of the country...was chosen by and permits free and fair elections...respects human rights...does not persistently engage in gross violations of internationally recognized human rights, including extra-judicial or arbitrary executions, disappearances, torture or severe mistreatment, prolonged arbitrary imprisonment..."¹⁰ So the regulations do exist, but does the rhetoric play out in reality?

In a word, no. "Human rights have not been a major barrier to weapons sales at any time in history. The world's worst dictators, despots, human rights abusers and anti-democratic regimes have been the customers of all of the major arms supplying

countries in the world -- and continue to be so," states Gideon Burrows, anti-arms trade activist and author. American arms sales are never made without knowledge of the buyer's history, but knowledge does not translate into action. In a profit-centered economy, arms makers are loath to deny a sale to anyone, as long as they have the cash. The US Government also commonly uses arms sales as political maneuvering tools; they repeatedly supported repressive regimes during the Cold War with the intention of getting as many nations on their side as possible, regardless of history. During the fiscal year 1998, around 54 percent of US arms transfers to the developing world went to undemocratic regimes¹¹, and in 1999 the US delivered about \$6.8 billion in armaments to nations which violate the basic standards set by the US's own Code of Conduct on Arms Sales¹².

Conservative politicians and arms lobbyists often excuse this behavior with the simple statement: "If we didn't sell them guns, someone else would." When the US supplies rebel armies and guerilla factions, they say that the people have a right to overthrow their government. But, as Nobel-prize winner Oscar Arias put it, "Some Colombians or Bolivians could argue that exporting mind-altering drugs to the US is justified because the production of cocaine and marijuana creates jobs in their own agricultural, industrial, and commercial sectors. Moreover, it could be claimed that, if these drugs were not exported from Colombia or Bolivia, they would simply be supplied by other countries...If we are frightened by the extent of drug trafficking...from the South toward the North, we must then also be scandalized by the scope and magnitude of...arms sales from the North to the South." The idea that the arms themselves accelerate and intensify violent conflict is not addressed by the right. As William Hartung succinctly put it, "The ready availability of small arms makes these conflicts far more likely to occur, far more deadly once they start, and far more difficult to resolve once the death tolls start to mount and the urge for revenge takes hold."¹³ When everyone in a country that is in turmoil has easy access to serious weapons, it is obvious that carnage will result. The proliferation of arms means also that children can easily obtain them once they are on the black market, and children are more easily coerced into joining violent insurgent groups (or the ranks of corrupt governments' armed forces).

US Foreign Policy Regarding Arms Sales

July 25, 1969 was the day that Neil Armstrong, Buzz Aldrin and Jim Lovell returned from their momentous trip to the moon. When they splashed down in the Pacific Ocean, newly-elected President Richard Nixon was there to meet and congratulate them. He was slated to give an informal, salutary speech to the press stressing issues of patriotism and scientific achievement. Instead, he gave an

¹¹ Burrows, 2002

¹² Hartung, 2001

¹³ Burrows, 2002

impromptu 50-minute speech outlining a new foreign policy attitude engineered by Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security officer. This new policy, later dubbed the "Nixon Doctrine" by the media, would irrevocably change the face of US foreign policy, and is still heavily influential today. The ostensible goal of this doctrine was to assert American military hegemony while still somehow finesse a retreat from Vietnam, a conflict which was only worsening and becoming more and more of a global tragedy and American embarrassment. Nixon dictated that America "should assist, but not dictate...We must avoid the kind of policy that will make countries in Asia so dependent upon us that we are dragged into conflicts such as the one we have in Vietnam...If any nation desires the assistance of the United States militarily in order to meet an internal or external threat, we will provide it."¹⁴ The speech stunned many in Washington; it seemed as though Nixon wanted the United States to assume a big brother-helper role, one which promoted peace and diplomacy instead of the American tradition of aggression and unnecessary military intervention. But this was largely just lip service to try and quell the increasingly vocal, anti-Vietnam peace movement in America. In actuality, this new doctrine was a way for the Nixon administration to explore potential new markets for the American defense industry. The new administration focused on the Third World, investigating the sale of American arms to regimes in developing countries that could pay with oil. The oil monarchies of the Persian Gulf were rich (corrupt regimes could comfortably afford high-tech weapons with oil money even though their people were starving), in need of new arms technology, and the United States was all too happy to sell. The new strategy was aimed at boosting the domestic arms industry, as they suffered a slowdown following the buildup during the Vietnam War. Foreign Military Sales (the main conduit for exporting US weapons) had stood at less than \$2 billion before 1971, but had reached \$15 billion by 1975, the new major buyers being Saudi Arabia, Iran and Israel.¹⁵ The United States started promoting a "new diplomacy," which asked foreign countries to decide their own defense needs, and then go straight to the United States to fill the order. It was aimed at moving the burden of responsibility from the arms merchant to the consumer, while leaving all the power and profits at home in the US. Even though the new doctrine was sold to the public as a way out of Vietnam, Nixon did nothing to the effect. He, in fact, increased American presence in Indochina after the Guam speech, spreading the war to Cambodia with atrocious and shameful results.

The intense growth of the American defense industry during the 1970's gave rise to a new group of powerful weapons-industry lobbyists. The arms boom was also legitimized by conservative Washington think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, who wrote countless reports on the Soviet menace and the need for extensive militarization, at home and abroad with our allies. The new shift to the right alarmed the Democratic Party at first; they introduced legislation to try and tame the new

¹⁴ Tirman, 1997

¹⁵ Tirman, 1997

beast. The Arms Control Export Act passed in 1976 amid furious lobbying by the weapons industry and censure by Henry Kissinger, but had virtually no impact in reality. Human rights considerations and a \$9 billion per year ceiling on arms exports were removed from the bill before it could be brought to President Ford, who wasn't willing to sign such a "controversial" bill. As William Hartung of the World Policy Institute notes, "The industry argument boiled down to a simple assertion that if U.S. arms makers could no longer sell to Arab regimes that discriminated against American Jews or to Third World dictators who routinely violated the human rights of their citizens, they would be losing out on the fastest-growing segments of the arms market." And so the principles and actions laid out by Nixon continued unabated, as the weapons industry continued to gain money, power, and influence in Washington.

Human rights and anti-arms trade activists were heartened briefly at the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976, a man who was quoted early in his Presidency as saying, "We cannot be both the world's leading champion of peace and the world's leading supplier of the weapons of war." Carter soon created a presidential directive that created a ceiling on US arms exports and an outright ban on exports to certain undemocratic regimes. He was immediately criticized by conservatives everywhere, who said this new policy was weak-hearted and unrealistic; a stark departure from Nixon-Kissinger-style '*realpolitik*' tactics for fighting the Cold War. Right-wingers and arms lobbyists insisted that human rights could *never* be the leading edge of American foreign policy in a world which seems to disregard sentimentality in favor of the bottom line. But the left-right tension on arms exports was, yet again, only skin deep. The actual number of weapons sold from the United States continued to rise sharply; the Foreign Military Sales program increased exports by more than 30 percent from 1977 to 1978. Carter's peaceful rhetoric of human rights and fewer arms exports was never carried out in reality.

To the delight of the arms industry, Ronald Reagan won the 1981 election, mostly through scare tactics about the ever-present Soviet menace. The American people, in the midst of an economic depression and confused as well as frightened about a Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, were easily led to believe that Reagan's brand of militarization as a means to a stronger economy and a safer country was the best option they had. As soon as the Reagan administration assumed control, any guise of Carter's humanitarian concerns regarding arms exports were quickly discarded. Reagan took removed Carter's few remaining restrictions on the industry and expanded Pentagon spending by 40 percent in his first term alone. Government spending on the domestic weapons industry (research, development and direct subsidies) went from \$42 billion in 1980 to \$98 billion by 1985. The Reagan rearmament gave a huge boost to the industry, creating more than 1 million jobs in arms-producing areas of the US like Connecticut, Texas and California. The Reagan administration didn't stop at simply inflating the domestic industry, however. There was a new policy emerging, one

parallel to Nixon's but this time termed "the Reagan Doctrine." There was a transformation of military thinking, with an emphasis on the special training of military forces to carry out "surgical strikes" against various adversaries. Night raids, covert action and light yet deadly weapons were essential elements of the conflicts that this new policy encouraged - US soldiers or foreign forces trained by the US were meant to find terrorist cells and annihilate them, quickly and covertly.

"A particular concern -- one might even call it an obsession -- was the fight against terrorism...The tactic of labeling violent insurgents we like 'freedom fighters' and violent insurgents we don't like 'terrorists' was learned by regimes around the world and quickly entered the lexicon of global politics."

-John Tirman, Spoils of War

The most important legacy of the Reagan Doctrine was the actions that the United States government took in Afghanistan that accelerated during the 1980's. Soviet forces had invaded the country, and the US decided to fund and train anti-communist guerilla forces to drive them out and maintain US hegemony in the region. The United States supplied these Islamic fundamentalist fighters, the *mujahedin*, with over \$2 billion in covert military assistance.¹⁶ The fighters (many of whom were organized into the terrorist organization called the Taliban, led by Osama Bin Laden) were trained well, and they successfully ousted the Soviets in February of 1989. American politicians lauded this action as a great success, the proof they needed that the Reagan Doctrine was the key to finally destroying the USSR. Arming and organizing these Islamic fundamentalist fighters has had a decidedly different legacy on the world, however.

"The violence sparked by U.S. weapons and training to the Afghan rebel movements extends far beyond Afghanistan. An Algerian government official has described a "floating army" of Islamic fundamentalist fighters who received weapons and training in Afghanistan...two of the men convicted in the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center had received weapons and explosives from CIA-backed rebels in Afghanistan prior to their attack in New York."

-William Hartung, 1995

Apart from the devastating effects on Islamic targets worldwide, the weapons provided to the *mujahedin* created an intense escalation of violence in the civil war taking place between competing rebel factions in Afghanistan. And, as is always the case, weapons that were intended for one use inevitably end up elsewhere. "...the Northwest Frontier area of Pakistan [just south of Afghanistan] is dotted with open air weapons marts that are doing a brisk business reselling weapons that were originally intended to go to Afghan rebel forces."¹⁷ CIA-supplied weapons now stock the supplies of terrorist organizations all over the world, including Hezbollah and PKK fighters. Afghanistan suffered immensely as a result of this war; they were thrown

¹⁶ Hartung, 1995

¹⁷ Hartung, 1995

into even deeper economic depression and, as a result, are now the leading supplier of heroin in the world. These consequences were not publicized, however, or even acknowledged as a possible detriment to the efficacy of the Reagan Doctrine. A new philosophy had swept over the US Capitol, aimed at routing Communism at all costs. "...Security would be gained not by the weak and appeasing gestures of diplomacy, but through military superiority, technological dazzlement, belligerent speech, covert intimidation. Rights were meaningless without freedom. Marxian terrorists should be defeated by any means available. Muslim radicals would be rooted out and destroyed...challenges to Western 'interests' should and could be defeated by the ruthless application of military power."¹⁸

The Reaganite brand of militarization as a means to security has remained entrenched in US foreign policy ever since, despite considerable dissension among US citizens. George H.W. Bush, elected in 1989, continued the trend of unwarranted intervention in the Middle East, although this time with a slightly different motive, now that the Cold War was over. Saddam Hussein's Iraq had invaded Kuwait, and the United States was terrified at the prospect of Iraq controlling over 60 percent of the world's oil. Despite many protests and a genuine split in the American opinion, George Bush felt the need to start a war; US troops were sent into Kuwait on January 15, 1991, the beginning of Operation Desert Storm. Many were initially confused by this action, since Americans had engineered a gradual shift of preference from Iran to Iraq in the 1980's, following and during the Iran-Iraq war. The infamous meeting of U.S. ambassador April Glaspie and Saddam Hussein took place only one week before the invasion of Kuwait, where she stated, "We have no opinion on Arab-Arab politics," but that Kuwait's oil pricing policies (which didn't favor Iraq) were "parallel to military aggression against Iraq." So even though the United States had been subsidizing Hussein's regime right up until he invaded Kuwait, the story told to the media was one of "liberating the Kuwaiti people." Americans believed it, and Operation Desert Storm went ahead and accomplished its goals. Casualties on the US side were minimal, a few dozen deaths and the emergence of "Gulf War Syndrome," which still has yet to be fully explained by the medical establishment. But the effects on Iraq were devastating. Aside from the deaths of between 50,000 and 100,000 Iraqi soldiers, the effects of the economic sanctions placed on them were far-reaching. Instead of entirely removing Saddam in the first Gulf War, the United States decided to deprive Iraq (sanction meaning ban) of the basic necessities of life, hoping that this would prompt an internal regime change. What it did instead was to target Iraqi children, helpless and disproportionately present in Iraq (the percentage of the population of children in Iraq is much higher than in the US - 50 percent of citizens are under the age of 16¹⁹). The United States has made it impossible for Iraq to function, depriving them of necessities such as clean water or plumbing. They have also used weapons which contain

¹⁸ Tirman, 1997

¹⁹ Voices in the Wilderness, 2003

radioactive depleted uranium, a toxic substance which will be polluting Iraq and its people for 4500 million years (it does not decompose easily). Doctors in Iraq have seen the effects of this firsthand, stating that "More than 40% of the population in this area will get cancer in five years' time...Most of my family now has cancer, and we have no history of the disease...We are living through another Hiroshima." The sanctions make it impossible to keep a city clean, leaving raw sewage to rot in the streets and cause even more infection. The Oil for Food program, installed by the US as an excuse to get Iraq's oil, has never followed through on the "food" part - the UN Office of the Iraq Program estimates that the people of Iraq are owed over \$5 billion in food, housing, electricity, and other means of subsistence promised by the United States.²⁰ The UN estimates that nearly 5 million children risk spending their formative years in deprived and unsafe circumstances as a result of the sanctions.²¹

William Jefferson Clinton, a Democrat, was elected in 1993 and many pacifists hoped this break from a Republican-controlled White House would increase chances of reform for the arms trade. Clinton initially set out three goals for new foreign policy, an attempt at reclaiming ground lost during the misguided Reagan and Bush years. The first objective was to gradually reduce reliance on Iraq as a US ally, due in part to the controversy surrounding Saddam Hussein's deplorable human rights record. The second was to promote free trade as a new tool of foreign policy; the weapons industry in particular was encouraged to increase exports in order to reclaim lost jobs and profits in that sector. Clinton's final goal was to refocus attention on human rights, an area that had been ignored during twelve years of Republican control. Clinton and his team acknowledged that serious mistakes had been made; the US support of the Shah of Iran²² during the 1970's and 80's had collapsed, and the Reagan-Bush policy of strengthening Saddam had exploded in the first Gulf War. The Clinton administration finally seemed to realize the importance of the "backlash" effect in arms trading; US troops deployed to foreign areas found themselves fighting an enemy with the same American-made weapons that they had. But before he even became President, Clinton had shown where his priorities really lay. He publicly endorsed sales of fighter jets to Saudi Arabia and Taiwan, despite global disapproval of those countries' records on human rights. Once in office, Clinton did nothing to decrease the influence of the weapons-makers lobby in Washington, but issued a formal policy statement to try and appease the anti-arms trade campaigners. It included five key points that the Clinton administration claimed as priorities when deciding foreign policy regarding arms, which are as follows: 1). Ensure technological advantage for

²⁰ *Voices in the Wilderness*, 2003

²¹ Tirman, 1997

²² The Shah of Iran fled to exile in 1979 after his own people, angry after years of abuse on the part of his regime, revolted against him. Ayatollah Khomeini assumed control in Iran, preaching hatred towards the United States as the ultimate Devil. Then-president Jimmy Carter allowed the shah to enter the US for medical treatment, and Khomeini's party was furious. Supporters invaded the American embassy in Iran and captured 66 Americans. 53 of them were held captive for over a year, creating a huge diplomatic and media scandal. (*Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History*, 2002)

United States forces. 2). Help allies defend themselves against aggression. 3). Promote regional stability in areas crucial to US interests while preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction. 4). Promote peaceful conflict resolution and arms control, human rights, democratization and other US foreign policy objectives. 5). Enhance the ability of the US [weapons industry] to meet US defense requirements at lower costs. The underlying assumption here is, of course, that US weapons are *only* going to allies and “coalition partners” that will only use the weapons for defensive purposes.

Meanwhile, Clinton maintained the US relationship with Turkey, providing them arms and training in order to win its war on the Kurdish Worker's Party (PKK). Although the PKK uses guerrilla/terrorist-style tactics, the Turkish government has proven themselves no better. Turkey's government is considered by many as the worst abuser of human rights worldwide, and have been violently repressing the Kurds long before the PKK started fighting back. Since the outbreak of the war, almost 40,000 people have been killed in Turkey, the majority of them Kurds.²³ Clinton also engineered US involvement in Haiti, sending American troops in to “clear the path” for Haiti's elected leader, Jean Bertrand Aristide. When soldiers arrived in Haiti, they found troops outfitted with the same weapons, troops that had received extensive training (purportedly for anti-narcotics purposes) from the CIA. While American casualties in this conflict were minimal, it was yet another example of the boomerang effect of US weapons exports, and of an administration claiming to have priorities that clearly weren't carried out in practice.

In 2001, George W. Bush, the son of George H.W. Bush and nephew of senator Prescott Bush, became president of the United States. Weapons makers were huge contributors to his campaign, and several of his close friends and relatives are executives at different major US arms firms. Nine months after Bush assumed his father's former post, the Taliban organized a brutal attack on the United States. Three planes were hijacked and crashed into major US buildings; one into the Pentagon and two into the World Trade Center. Almost 3,000 American civilians were killed. In the sorrow and shock of the aftermath, Bush responded just as Reagan, or his father would have; he declared a war. He called it a “war on terrorism,” and the first step was to rout the Taliban out of Afghanistan. Bush accomplished this by increasing the current American military presence in the country, and increasing bombings (aimed at suspected terrorists sites), killing hundreds of civilians. American citizens were terribly scared; and for good reason, the September eleventh attacks were the worst ever attacks on American soil (displacing Pearl Harbor as the most deadly attack). Once it was discovered that the culprits were members of the Taliban, trained and organized by Osama Bin Laden, and located in Afghanistan, it was easy to gain support for a US offensive on the country. Americans everywhere who were able to realize the connection between the Taliban and the CIA (mainly that they were trained and

²³ Burrows, 2002

supplied by the United States government) were forced to try and convince everyone else that this link existed. American media does not tend to criticize the government unless it absolutely has to, and anyone caught questioning the war in Afghanistan or bloodlust for Bin Laden was seen as unpatriotic, as well as a possible terrorist. In a rehashing of McCarthyism, American grief and confusion quickly evolved into anger and suspicion of their neighbors as potential terrorists. The war on terror was seen as a noble cause to fight, even if it took a very long time.

"There's a variety of theaters. So long as anybody's terrorizing established governments, there needs to be a war."

-George W. Bush, Oct. 17, 2001²⁴

Under the guise of a "war on terror", the United States invaded Iraq in March of 2003, despite huge peace protests worldwide where millions of people announced their disgust at this transparent ploy to get at Iraq's oil. The US claimed that Saddam Hussein, still dictator of Iraq, was connected and may have funded Osama Bin Laden's Taliban although they provided no proof of this link. They asserted that Hussein was holding weapons of mass destruction, and was liable to destroy the world with them at any moment. But the most important reason for invasion that the US stressed to the rest of the world was that the people of Iraq needed to be free from this brutal dictator. The invasion was a 'success,' and as of the writing of this piece, Saddam Hussein and his party are either in exile or dead from US bombs. George W. Bush has yet to decide who exactly he wants in power in Iraq, but it will no doubt be someone who will remain under US control for the foreseeable future. After the fact, inspections continued for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. What the UN's searchers found amounted to little more than some empty warehouses and rusted barrels, pictures of which were shown to US citizens as proof that these weapons may have once existed.

Conclusion: What's to be done?

"Many would be forgiven for feeling hopeless about the arms trade. The picture painted here is one of an uncontrollable, cash-eating monolith beyond the reach of individual nation states, causing havoc and destruction wherever it visits with no regard for human lives, decency, accountability or even the laws of the countries in which it operates...next to prostitution, the arms trade is perhaps the world's oldest and most ingrained profession," concludes Gideon Burrows. It certainly seems an unwinnable fight for the peace and anti-arms trade activists. One of the strongest tools these campaigners have is the push for diversification of arms-producing companies. The idea is for them to put money into developing some skill or product which enriches or modernizes society instead of destroying it. But, just like the illegal drug trade, it is hard to argue with the profits gained from selling dangerous products. Demand is always high for weapons, as fighting continues all over the world. And until

²⁴ Andreas, 2002

there are reasonable jobs for Americans elsewhere in the industrial sector, politicians will try to protect whatever jobs their constituents have, even if they are creating the tools of violence. The first and necessary step out of this vicious cycle is to remove the connections between American government and American arms producers. There is no way for government to make an unbiased, responsible decision when their priorities are in any part controlled by the arms industry. This will entail an overhaul of American government, yes, but if more citizens are aware of the atrocities being carried out in their name, perhaps an influential civil movement could be created. Until then, we can only hope that those in power will consider human lives of non-Americans as important as possible political or financial gain. The fight against the arms trade cannot be considered separate from the fight for global human rights and social justice. Racism, ignorance, greed and violence will rule unless we realize the importance of this fight.

"A true revolution of values will lay hands on the world order and say of war: 'This way of settling differences is not just.' This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of people normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice and love.

*-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence,"
speech in New York City, 1967*